

STATE OF THE STATE MESSAGE
ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Presented by Michael
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MINNESOTA STATE
COUNCIL ON DISABILITY

State Capitol Rotunda
February 6, 1989

GOOD MORNING. ON BEHALF OF THE MINNESOTA STATE COUNCIL ON DISABILITY, I WANT TO WELCOME EACH OF YOU AND THANK YOU FOR BRAVING THE FRIGID TEMPERATURES TO PARTICIPATE IN TODAY'S RALLY. LET ME ASSURE YOU, HOWEVER, THAT THERE WILL BE ENOUGH DISCUSSION ABOUT "HOT" ISSUES TO KEEP YOU WARM THIS MORNING!!!

600-THOUSAND MINNESOTANS ARE SAYING "NO MORE." 15 PERCENT OF THIS STATE'S POPULATION IS SAYING IT WANTS ACCESS TO ALL PROGRAMS AND OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED HERE. ONE OUT OF EVERY SEVEN CITIZENS IS SAYING THEY REFUSE TO BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY HAVE DISABILITIES. A MINNESOTAN...THE LATE GREAT HUBERT HUMPHREY ...PROUDLY LED THE FIGHT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS BACK IN 1948. AND MINNESOTA WILL PROUDLY LEAD THE FIGHT FOR EQUAL ACCESS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN 1989.

LATE LAST YEAR GOVERNOR PERPICH APPOINTED ME CHAIRPERSON OF THIS ADVOCACY COUNCIL..JUST AS HE APPOINTED ALL 21 MEMBERS. OUR FUNCTION IS TO ADVISE THE GOVERNOR, THE LEGISLATURE AND OTHER PUBLIC OFFICIALS ABOUT POLICY THAT WILL MOST EFFECTIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO MAXIMUM INDEPENDENCE FOR PERSONS WHO ARE DISABLED. WE ARE ALSO MANDATED TO REVIEW AND COMMENT ON ALL PROGRAMS, SERVICES AND FACILITIES SERVING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES... AS WELL AS SERVE AS A SOURCE OF INFORMATION.

WE HAVE MUCH TO BE PROUD OF HERE IN MINNESOTA. OUR STATE HAS A LONG AND ILLUSTRIOUS HISTORY OF COMMITMENT TO THE GOOD OF ITS PEOPLE. WE DO WHAT IS RIGHT..WHAT IS JUST..REGARDLESS OF WHAT OTHER STATES ARE DOING.

WE LEAD THE. NATION IN SECURING RIGHTS FOR PEOPLE WITH NEED. MINNESOTA'S PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ARE AMONG THE VERY BEST IN THE COUNTRY. OUR PROGRAMS INVOLVING HUMAN SERVICE ISSUES, EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND HANDICAPPED PARKING SERVE AS ROLE MODELS FOR THE OTHER 49 STATES.

BUT WE HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO BEFORE ALL MINNESOTANS WITH DISABILITIES ARE TREATED AS FULL AND EQUAL MEMBERS OF SOCIETY...AND NOT AS SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS. THE LARGEST MINORITY IN THE STATS DESERVES BETTER THAN THIS...AND WE CAN DO BETTER THAN THIS... BECAUSE WE MINNESOTANS ARE COMMITTED TO DOING WHAT IS RIGHT..DOING WHAT IS JUST.

THERE ARE SEVERAL ISSUES THAT HISTORICALLY HAVE BEEN OF MAJOR CONCERN TO US...AND WE FULLY INTEND TO WORK WITH LAWMAKERS ON THESE ISSUES DURING THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION:

EMPLOYMENT: EMPLOYMENT IS AN IMPORTANT KEY TO ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE AND A SENSE OF SELF-WORTH. AND IN OUR SOCIETY, OUR JOBS OFTEN DETERMINE HOW OTHERS VIEW US...THE OLD ADAGE

"IT'S NOT WHO YOU ARE BUT WHAT YOU DO" THAT COUNTS. PERSONS WHO ARE DISABLED HAVE THE HIGHEST RATE OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE COUNTRY. A RECENT NATIONAL POLL CONDUCTED BY LOU HARRIS REVEALED THAT TWO-THIRDS OF ALL PERSONS WHO ARE DISABLED ARE UNEMPLOYED. AND OF THAT NUMBER, TWO-THIRDS WANT TO WORK. THEY WANT TO HAVE JOBS -REAL JOBS- NOT JUST TOKEN JOBS. THEY WANT TO COME HOME AFTER A DAY AT WORK..JUST LIKE YOU DO..AND FEEL PROUD OF THEIR EFFORTS..PROUD OF THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS.

IT IS THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSIBILITY TO ASSURE THAT THE 55 MILLION DOLLARS SPENT BY THE STATE DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES IS NOT WASTED..BUT RESULTS IN MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT FOR PERSONS WHO ARE DISABLED.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO A PERSON WHO IS DISABLED WHEN A D.R.S. CASE IS..QUOTE..."CLOSED"? DOES IT MEAN THAT THE INDIVIDUAL HAS BEEN PLACED IN AN INDEPENDENT JOB? DOES IT MEAN HE HAS BEEN PLACED IN A VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM? WHAT A "CLOSED" CASE SHOULD MEAN IS THAT EVERY MINNESOTAN WHO HAS A DISABILITY AND IS ABLE TO HOLD DOWN A JOB, HAS ONE..-AND IS EMPLOYED INDEPENDENTLY WITHOUT SUBSIDY.

IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT WE GET THE MESSAGE ACROSS TO EMPLOYERS THAT HIRING QUALIFIED WORKERS WHO ARE DISABLED IS NOT CHARITY...BUT GOOD BUSINESS.

HEALTH INSURANCE; THE ISSUES SURROUNDING HEALTH CARE HAVE REACHED CRISIS PROPORTIONS. IN THE MOST AFFLUENT NATION IN THE WORLD, EVERY CITIZEN HAS A RIGHT TO EXPECT ADEQUATE HEALTH CARE. AND IT IS A NATIONAL SHAME THAT PEOPLE IN THIS COUNTRY ARE UNPROTECTED...THAT SOME PEOPLE DIE BECAUSE THEY CANNOT AFFORD THE ASTRONOMICAL COSTS OF HEALTH CARE. AT THE BOTTOM RUNG OF THE LADDER ARE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

BECAUSE OF OUR SYSTEM, HEALTH INSURANCE IS A NECESSITY FOR ALL CITIZENS. ALL OF US... EVERY SINGLE ONE OF US...HAS THE RIGHT TO BE ADEQUATELY PROTECTED SHOULD WE BECOME ILL. THE LARGEST MINORITY IN THIS STATE HAS THE RIGHT TO HEALTH INSURANCE. NO ONE SHOULD BE DENIED HEALTH CARE COVERAGE BECAUSE THEY ARE POOR, NON-WHITE OR DISABLED... ESPECIALLY HERE IN MINNESOTA WHERE WE ARE ONE OF THE NATION'S LEADERS IN INNOVATIVE HEALTH CARE.

THE SINGLE GREATEST OBSTACLE TO EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IS A LACK OF ADEQUATE HEALTH CARE COVERAGE. THIS IS A POPULATION...FOR LACK OF OTHER OPTIONS...DEPENDS ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY ON MEDICAL ASSISTANCE, MEDICARE OR MEDICAID. YET WHEN THEY RETURN TO WORK AND BECOME INDEPENDENT ...BY VIRTUE OF THEIR INCREASED INCOME...THEY LOSE THEIR COVERAGE FOR MEDICAL CARE. INSTEAD OF PERMITTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES TO WORK AND BE ECONOMICALLY INDEPENDENT,

WE ARE FORCING THEM TO REMAIN TAX-DEPENDENT RATHER THAN BECOME TAXPAYERS. WE NOT ONLY NOW PAY FOR THEIR HEALTH CARE, BUT ALSO THEIR RENT, FOOD, CLOTHING, ET CETERA. THIS MAKES NO SENSE.

HEALTH INSURANCE IS A NUMBER ONE PRIORITY FOR THE COUNCIL. WE ARE CURRENTLY EXAMINING A BILL BEFORE THE MINNESOTA HOUSE CALLED "HEALTHSPAN." ITS AUTHORS ARE REPRESENTATIVES OGREN, ANDERSON, GREENFIELD, WYNIA AND SEABERG. THIS BILL MANDATES A BASE-LEVEL OF HEALTH INSURANCE ON ALL MINNESOTANS BY JULY OF NEXT YEAR. THE COUNCIL REALIZES THAT THIS BILL DOESN'T MEET ALL OF OUR INSURANCE NEEDS...BUT WE FEEL IT IS A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. WE WILL ASK LEGISLATORS TO CONSIDER AN INSURANCE POOL DESIGNED TO ASSURE ADEQUATE COVERAGE TO ANY EMPLOYEE WHO IS DISABLED AND NO LONGER ELIGIBLE FOR MEDICAL ASSISTANCE. EMPLOYEES WHO ARE DISABLED FIND IT TOUGH ENOUGH TO OBTAIN A JOB WITHOUT HAVING TO HAGGLE OVER INSURANCE BENEFITS.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION: IN 1987, NEARLY 40-THOUSAND MINNESOTANS BECAME PART OF THE DISABLED POPULATION, ON EITHER A TEMPORARY OR PERMANENT BASIS, AS A RESULT OF AN INJURY SUSTAINED ON THE JOB. 40-THOUSAND!!

WORKERS COMPENSATION PREMIUMS COST MINNESOTA BUSINESSES 843-MILLION DOLLARS THAT YEAR. SIXTY PERCENT OF THAT... 510 MILLION DOLLARS...WENT TO WORKERS VIA MEDICAL BENEFITS AND WAGE LOSSES. THE REMAINING 40 PERCENT... 333 MILLION DOLLARS... WENT TO THE INSURANCE COMPANIES WHO WROTE THE POLICIES. I RECOGNIZE THE LEGITIMATE CONCERNS OF BUSINESS ...BUT OUR CONSTITUTION DOES NOT GUARANTEE UNLIMITED PROFITS FOR INSURANCE COMPANIES!!!

IN COOPERATION WITH COMMISSIONER KEN PETERSON OF THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRY, AND COMMISSIONER JOE SAMARJIA OF THE DEPARTMENT OF JOBS AND TRAINING, I AM ESTABLISHING AN INDEPENDENT TASK FORCE TO EXAMINE THE IMPACT OF WORKERS' COMPENSATION PROPOSALS AND OBSTACLES TO EMPLOYMENT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES. THIS 10-MEMBER, BLUE-RIBBON PANEL WILL MEET FOR ONE YEAR AND REPORT BACK TO THE COUNCIL, THE COMMISSIONERS AND THE LEGISLATURE ON POTENTIAL LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS.

AS A WARNING TO THOSE IN THE COMMUNITY WHO WOULD ARBITRARILY REDUCE BENEFITS TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, I WANT TO SEND THE MESSAGE THAT THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY WILL BE INVOLVED IN THIS ISSUE. IT IS A STATUTE OBLIGATION OF THE COUNCIL TO REVIEW AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS ON WORKER'S COMPENSATION MATTERS.

AS I'VE SAID BEFORE, I'M PROUD TO COME FROM A STATE WHOSE POLITICAL TRADITIONS DICTATE THAT DECISIONS ON SUCH THINGS AS WORKERS' COMPENSATION ARE PREDICATED ON A REALISTIC ASSESSMENT OF NEED AND A SENSE OF JUSTICE... NOT ON A KNEE-JERK REACTION TO WHAT OTHER STATES ARE PAYING. I BELIEVE THAT MOST OF US ARE PROUD THAT THE FIRST VOLUNTEER REGIMENT IN THE CIVIL WAR CAME FROM MINNESOTA, AND AT THAT TIME, OUR LEADERS WERE LESS CONCERNED WITH WHAT OTHER STATES WERE DOING THAN WHAT WAS THE RIGHT AND JUST THING TO DO.

TRANSPORTATION; WE ARE A SOCIETY ON THE MOVE. NEARLY EVERYONE WE KNOW OWNS AT LEAST ONE CAR. FOR THE DISABLED, IT'S A DIFFERENT MATTER. IN THE METRO AREA, WHILE CERTAINLY INADEQUATE, WE HAVE METRO MOBILITY...BUT IN RURAL MINNESOTA THERE IS NOTHING.

IN THE TWIN CITIES, 14,600 RESIDENTS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR METRO MOBILITY. THE AGENCY RECEIVES NEARLY 500 NEW REQUESTS FOR ELIGIBILITY EACH MONTH...OR ALMOST SIX-THOUSAND NEW RIDERS ANNUALLY. THAT'S AN INCREASE OF ALMOST 40-PERCENT IN JUST ONE YEAR! THIS YEAR THE REGIONAL TRANSIT BOARD IS REQUESTING 28 MILLION DOLLARS IN FUNDING...AND EVEN THAT AMOUNT WILL NOT ASSURE EQUITABLE TRANSPORTATION FOR THE

INDIVIDUAL RIDER. THE EFFORT TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR METRO MOBILITY WILL BE AN OVERWHELMING CHALLENGE FOR THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY.

BUT THE SITUATION IS MORE BLEAK IN RURAL AREAS. NEARLY ALL OF THESE COMMUNITIES HAVE NO PUBLIC TRANSIT SYSTEMS. WHERE THERE IS NO PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM, THERE IS NO TRANSIT SYSTEM OF ANY KIND AVAILABLE TO PERSONS WHO ARE DISABLED. IN OTHER WORDS, IF YOU ARE DISABLED AND LIVING IN RURLA MINNESOTA, YOU ARE HELD HOSTAGE IN YOUR HOME.

AND YOU CANNOT HAVE A JOB WITHOUT A MEANS TO GET THERE. IF YOU CAN'T GET A JOB BECAUSE OF A LACK OF TRANSPORTATION... THEN ALL OF THE MONEY SPENT ON YOUR EDUCATION. AND REHABILITATION SERVICES IS WASTED. YOU ARE FORCED TO MOVE TO THE TWIN CITIES, AND GIVE UP YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS, YOUR ENTIRE SUPPORT SYSTEM.

IN COOPERATION WITH THE COMMISSIONER OF TRANSPORTATION, LEONARD LEVINE, AND COMMERCE COMMISSIONER MICHAEL HATCH, I AM ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO EXAMINE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM IN GREATER MINNESOTA. THIS SYSTEM WOULD UTILIZE EXISTING RESOURCES IN THE FORM OF THE 16-B-2 PROGRAM, WHICH PROVIDES LIFT-EQUIPPED VEHICLES TO NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION'S. I BELIEVE WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO HELP PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES STAY IN THEIR HOME COMMUNITIES AND NOT DEMAND SUBSTANTIAL STATE APPROPRIATION.

ACCESSIBILITY: IN THE EARLY 1960's THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI . WAS REQUIRED BY LAW TO ALLOW MINORITY MEMBERS TO ATTEND STATE UNIVERSITIES. BUT IT WASN'T UNTIL ATTORNEY GENERAL ROBERT KENNEDY SENT NATIONAL GUARD TROOPS IN 1962 COULD JAMES MEREDETH ATTEND SCHOOL THERE.

WE HAVE SOME OF THE BEST LAWS IN THE COUNTRY WITH REGARD TO ACCESSIBILITY. BUT THEY'RE NOT BEING ENFORCED. IT IS A MAJOR PRIORITY OF THE COUNCIL AND THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY TO SEE THAT THESE LAWS ARE ENFORCED.

A FLIGHT OF STAIRS AT A CAUCUS SITE IS NO LESS AN OBSTACLE FOR A MINNESOTAN WHO IS DISABLED THAN A "WHITES ONLY" SIGN WAS FOR A BLACK CITIZEN.

A MAJOR STEP TOWARD THE ACTUALIZATION OF OUR GOAL OF ACCESSIBILITY IS THE ANNOUNCEMENT BY GOVERNOR PERPICH OF THE 29-MILLION DOLLAR ACCESS '92 PROGRAM. WE TAKE GREAT PRIDE THAT MINNESOTA HAS A GOVERNOR WHO HAS MADE THE KIND OF COMMITMENT TO THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY THAT SERVES AS A GUIDE TO EVERY STATE AND EVERY NATION. IF WE EXPECT THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO LIVE BY THIS CODE, THEN IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT ALL STATE-OWNED AND LEASED BUILDINGS ARE FULLY ACCESSIBLE. WE THANK GOVERNOR PERPICH FOR HIS COMMITMENT TO THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY AND HIS LEADERSHIP WHICH HAS IMPROVED THE LIVES OF THE DISABLED NOT ONLY IN MINNESOTA BUT ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

EVERY DISABILITY GROUP IS NOW CALLING UPON THE LEGISLATURE TO SUPPORT THIS IMPORTANT INITIATIVE BY GOVERNOR PERPICH.

IN COOPERATION WITH COMMISSIONER SANDRA HALE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION, I'M ESTABLISHING A BLUE-RIBBON TASK FORCE TO EXAMINE THE ISSUE OF ENFORCEMENT OF THE STATE BUILDING CODE THROUGHOUT MINNESOTA.

IN ADDITION TO THIS TASK FORCE, WE ARE ALSO ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO EXAMINE THE PROCESS BY WHICH THE STATE SELECTS AND PURCHASES EQUIPMENT AND ADAPTIVE DEVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES. COMMISSIONER SANDRA GARDEBRING OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES WILL PARTICIPATE WITH THIS ONE SINCE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS ARE SPENT THROUGH THIS DEPARTMENT ANNUALLY.

95 PERCENT OF ALL WHEELCHAIRS IN THE WORLD ARE MANUFACTURED AND SOLD BY ONE COMPANY —EVEREST AND JENNINGS. THE CHAIR I'M SITTING IN..ONE OF THEIR PRODUCTS...COSTS TWO-THOUSAND DOLLARS. THE CUSHION I'M SITTING ON COSTS 250 DOLLARS. AN ELECTRIC WHEELCHAIR WILL COST THE STATE BETWEEN TEN-THOUSAND AND 15-THOUSAND DOLLARS ...THE PRICE OF A GOOD CAR. IT'S A RIP-OFF. AND THE STATE IS AN UNWILLING VICTIM. WE MUST HAVE SOME ASSURANCE THAT THE PRODUCTS MEET THE NEEDS OF THE DISABLED AND REPRESENT A WISE PURCHASE FOR THE STATE.

ONE OF THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES FACING THIS STATE LEGISLATURE IS THE FUTURE ROLE OF REGIONAL TREATMENT CENTERS.

ALL PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES HAVE A CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO LIVE IN THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT. WE STRONGLY SUPPORT QUALITY INTEGRATED COMMUNITY PLACEMENTS FOR ALL PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES. HOWEVER, WE MUST BE ASSURED THAT ANY PLACEMENT WITHIN THE COMMUNITY MUST BE ONE THAT WILL PROVIDE THE NECESSARY SUPPORT AND SERVICES TO THOSE INDIVIDUALS TO ASSURE THEM OF LONG-TERM CARE AND INDEPENDENCE. THIS IS NOT A BLACK-AND-WHITE ISSUE. THOSE THAT TREAT IT AS SUCH KNOW LITTLE ABOUT THE NEEDS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.

SEGREGATED SETTINGS, BY THEIR VERY NATURE, ARE CONTRARY TO OUR GOALS. BUT RELEASING PEOPLE FROM THESE SETTINGS WITHOUT NECESSARY SUPPORT IS EVEN MORE DANGEROUS.

WE MUST BE SENSITIVE TO PARENTAL WISHES AND WORK ON THE NECESSARY SAFEGUARDS TO PROVIDE QUALITY ASSURANCE AND TRAINING.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES LEARN TO WAIT. YOU WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO PICK YOU UP. YOU WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO GIVE YOU A RIDE. YOU WAIT FOR A HANDICAPPED PARKING SPACE. YOU WAIT FOR THIS AND YOU WAIT FOR THAT. YOU WAIT AND WAIT.

AND I'M NOT A GOOD WAITER. MANY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE NOT GOOD WAITERS, EITHER. WE'VE SPENT

TOO MUCH OF OUR LIVES WAITING .WAITING FOR ACCESS TO PROGRAMS AND BUILDINGS...ACCESS THE REST OF YOU TAKE FOR GRANTED.

BLACK CITIZENS WAITED 100 YEARS FOR THE "WHITES ONLY" SIGNS TO COME DOWN. WE DON'T INTEND TO WAIT THAT LONG FOR BUILDINGS LIKE THE WORLD TRADE CENTER AND GALTIER PLAZA TO BE MADE ACCESSIBLE TO US. WE DON'T INTEND TO WAIT THAT LONG FOR DECENT EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES TO COME OUR WAY.

WE SHARE MORE SIMILARITIES THAN DIFFERENCES WITH YOU. WE WANT TO BE TREATED LIKE REAL PEOPLE -- JUST LIKE YOU. WE WANT ACCESS TO GOOD SCHOOLS -- JUST LIKE YOU. WE WANT ACCESS TO ADEQUATE HOUSING -- JUST LIKE YOU. WE WANT ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HEALTH INSURANCE--- JUST LIKE YOU. WE WANT ACCESS TO BETTER LIVES FOR OUR CHILDREN -- JUST LIKE YOU. WE WANT ACCESS TO MAKING OUR DREAMS A REALITY --JUST LIKE YOU.

MINNESOTA IS KNOWN FOR THE QUALITY OF LIFE IT OFFERS ITS CITIZENS. ALL OF US DESERVE AN EQUAL CHANCE TO DEVELOP OUR TALENTS HERE. WE CANNOT SAY TO 15 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION "NO, YOU CANNOT HAVE THAT RIGHT." WE OWE ALL OF OUR CITIZENS A BETTER STATE THAN THAT...BECAUSE HERE IN MINNESOTA WE DO WHAT IS RIGHT...WHAT IS JUST... REGARDLESS OF WHAT THE REST OF THE COUNTRY IS DOING.